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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002724

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL I
SUBJECT: SINIORA/ABDULLAH: A TALE OF TWO VISITS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2553
¶B. BAGHDAD 2699

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's August 20 visit to Baghdad ran longer than expected and focused on economic (trade, investment, and reduced-tariff oil sales) rather than political issues. Meeting with the Secretary on August 21, a clearly pleased Prime Minister Maliki praised the visit, describing it as evidence of security improvements and progress in general. He even pointed to the grand motorcade the GOI assembled for Siniora as an indication that the Iraqi state has returned to the international scene. Maliki also told the Secretary that Siniora had agreed to post an ambassador to Baghdad. (Note: MFA International Organizations Director Srood Najib told us on August 19 that the MFA has tentatively assigned one of the Diplomatic Zone villas to Lebanon and is in discussions with the Lebanese company that plans to renovate it, apparently for free. End note.)

¶2. (C) Siniora's visit contrasts sharply with the August 12 visit of King Abdullah of Jordan (ref A). The former was a full-day visit organized bilaterally with the GOI, in which Siniora was greeted by Maliki at the airport with full honors, and with security provided by the Iraqis, not MNF. The latter was significantly shorter, cloaked in secrecy (the Iraqis didn't even know who was coming until the last minute), mediated by the U.S., and soured by extensive Jordanian security requirements. Prime Ministerial Advisor Dr. Tariq Abdullah told us that while pleased overall with the King's visit, the GOI found the Jordanians' security measures "severe and insulting." "If we visit Amman again, I too will insist that we (canine) sweep the King's palace and that we bring our own tea and orange juice, as the Jordanians did."

¶3. (C) Maliki also told the Secretary that UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayid (MbZ) will soon visit Iraq, with investment projects on the agenda. MbZ's visit will continue the momentum set by recent visits by other senior regional officials (Sa'ad Hariri on July 17; Turkish PM Erdogan on July 10; a high-level Omani delegation on June 29; and UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayid on June 5). On August 21, an Egyptian inspection team completed a four-day visit during which it scouted potential diplomatic properties and assessed security conditions (including a meeting with Embassy RSO). We understand a UAE technical team is planning a similar visit.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The increased tempo of bilateral engagement -- at both the senior and working levels -- reflects, inter alia, a more confident and increasingly able (but still not there) GOI. Normalized diplomatic relations between Iraq and its neighbors is a key U.S. policy objective. Embassy's view is that we can best advance this goal by encouraging other countries to coordinate working-level diplomatic engagement with the Iraqi MFA (ref B), and by following the Siniora rather than the Abdullah model for senior-level interaction. We should note that Prime Minister Maliki received Siniora at the airport with

full honors, Iraqi security forces handled the airport security and transportation and not MNF.

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